

Bahrain

Facts and Statistics

Location: Middle East, archipelago in the Persian Gulf, east of Saudi Arabia

Capital: Manama

Climate: arid; mild, pleasant winters; very hot, humid summers

Population: 677,886 which includes 235,108 non-nationals (July 2004 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Bahraini 63%, Asian 19%, other Arab 10%, Iranian 8%

Religions: Shi'a Muslim 70%, Sunni Muslim 30%

Government: constitutional hereditary monarchy

Language in Bahrain

Arabic is the official language of Bahrain, but English is widely spoken. It is used in business and is a compulsory second language in schools. Among the non-Bahraini population, many people speak Farsi, the official language of Iran, or Urdu, the official language of Pakistan.

Arabic is spoken by almost 200 million people in more than 22 countries. It is the language of the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, and of Arab poetry and literature. While spoken Arabic varies from country to country, classical Arabic has remained unchanged for centuries. The Arabic language originated in Saudi Arabia in pre-Islamic times and spread across the Middle East during the 7th and 8th centuries. The official language of Bahrain is Modern Standard Arabic, a modernized form of classical Arabic. It is used in schools, for official purposes and for written communication within the Arabic-speaking international community. In Bahrain, there are differences between the dialects spoken in urban areas and those spoken in rural areas.

Although state radio and television are broadcast primarily in Arabic, newspapers and magazines in other languages are available. Al-Ayam is a leading Arabic newspaper. The Bahrain Tribune and the Gulf Daily News are English newspapers.

Why not learn some useful Arabic phrases?

Bahraini Culture and Society

Islam

Islam is practiced by the majority of Bahrainis and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam emanated from what is today Saudi Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries (following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses, Abraham, etc) to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain peoples. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Quran. The Quran and the actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) are used as the basis for all guidance in the religion.

Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact time is listed in the local newspaper each day. Friday is the Muslim holy day. Everything is closed. The weekend is Friday and Saturday.

During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public. Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate the breaking of the fast (iftar). The festivities often

continue well into the night. In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.

The Family/Tribe

- . The extended family or tribe forms the basis of both the social structure and individual identity.
- . Loyalty to the family comes before other social relationships, even business.
- . Nepotism is viewed positively, since it guarantees hiring people who can be trusted, which is crucial in a country where working with people one knows and trusts is of primary importance.
- . The family is very private. Prying questions should be avoided.
- . It is ordinary for large extended families to live in the same house, compound, or village.

Women in Bahrain

- . Women are more publicly active in Bahrain than in most Arab countries.
- . Many Bahraini women are not completely veiled; however, some still wear a head-covering in public.
- . Bahraini women are highly educated and are well represented in all of the major professions, as well as various women's societies and organizations.
- . About one-quarter of Bahraini women hold jobs outside the home.
- . Women have the right to vote.